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ABSTRACT

This handbook presents information and ideas to help beginning teachers in Wisconsin learn about their relationships with parents and communities. It includes four reproducible sections in a three-hole punched format. The first section, "Getting Started," includes an overview of how family-school-community partnerships improve student learning and several articles on communicating with and relating to families. The second section, "Meeting With Families," provides samples of letters, forms, and ideas to help teachers plan effective face-to-face sessions with students and families. The third section, "Linking Families to Learning," provides tips and forms for engaging family and community members as volunteers, strengthening skills at home, and reaching out to less-engaged parents. The fourth section, "Appendix," contains material to expand the teacher's knowledge about how effective family-school-community partnerships can get started and flourish in their schools. It also presents Web resources for teachers on family-school-community partnerships. (SM)

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New Teacher

WELCOME PACKET

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The New Teacher Welcome Packet

Fall 2000

Ruth Anne Landsverk
Coordinator of Families in Education Program

Published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Madison
with support from Parents Plus of Wisconsin
Menasha

John T. Benson, State Superintendent
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
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A Welcome Message

from State Superintendent John T. Benson

July 2000

Dear New Teacher:

I've been in education for 40 wonderful years. Without a doubt, this is the most exciting time of the year. Paint is fresh, floors are waxed, and bulletin boards are brand new in preparation for the arrival of thousands of bright-eyed, ready-to-learn children from all over Wisconsin.

As you get ready for the coming school year, please remember to include parents and families in your preparation. Not only are they their children's first teachers, but they are your best friends and allies as you try so hard to bring knowledge, skill, and the love of learning to every child in the state.

It can no longer be debated—children from loving, involved homes do better in school, stay in school longer, and participate in fewer risky behaviors. If you make your schools family friendly, you can take advantage of these powerful facts.

Several Wisconsin schools were named in a United States Department of Education study, "Dispelling the Myth: High Poverty Schools Exceeding Expectations." One of the keys to their success—in schools from Milwaukee to Hurley and Seneca to Flambeau—was a focus on efforts involving parents in the lives of their children.

As a new teacher, you have been chosen to perform one of the most valuable services there is. No matter where or what you teach, you need to realize that you are able to make a difference in the lives of children and their families.

Get the ball rolling now. Set a standard of excellence that includes students and their families. Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University says, "The way schools care about children is reflected in the ways schools care about the children's families."

No group in society has the same goal and mission as you do, except the parents of your students. Now—before the school year begins and day-to-day reality sets in—you need to take the first step in creating a positive relationship with the families in your communities. We hope this collection of reproducible, do-able materials helps get you started on this path.

Have a wonderful year and thank you for caring about and loving the children of Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

John T. Benson
State Superintendent

Congratulations, New Teacher!

Parents Plus of Wisconsin extends a hearty welcome to you as you begin your teaching career. We are happy to be co-sponsors of this packet designed especially to welcome new teachers and hope that you find this packet useful and informative.

Parents Plus of Wisconsin is a statewide initiative which offers technical assistance and training to school districts, family resource centers and home visiting programs. Parents Plus strongly encourages parents to become involved in their child's education. We also work with school staff so that they can see the benefits of forming and maintaining partnerships with parents. Technical assistance and training to school districts is done in collaboration with other statewide entities. This allows us to reach large numbers of people, as well as work individually with others if necessary.

Over 30 years of research tells us there are great benefits to children, parents and teachers when families are involved in the educational process. We encourage you to include parents in activities in and outside the classroom. When parents are involved children do better and schools improve.

Partnerships with parents improve school programs by increasing parent leadership and assisting teachers in their work. Some of your greatest allies will be the families of the children you teach. Partnerships must be viewed as an essential component of the school organization that influences student academic, social and emotional development. Our intent is to assist you as you develop strong parent partnerships within your classroom, school, and community.

If you would like to learn more about family/school/community partnerships or Parents Plus of Wisconsin, please call us at 1 (877) 384-1769.

Sincerely,

The Staff at Parents Plus of Wisconsin
P. O. Box 452
328 Sixth Street
Menasha, WI 54952

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and

with assistance from Susan Werley and Kristeen Christian of Parents Plus of Wisconsin.

How to Use This Packet

We have tried to design this packet with your convenience in mind. Each page is easily reproducible on a copier and three-hole punched to fit in a binder.

How is it Organized?

The **Getting Started** section includes an overview on how family-school-community partnerships improve student learning, and several articles on communicating with and relating to families.

The **Meeting with Families** section provides useful samples of letters, forms, and ideas to help you plan effective face-to-face sessions with students and families. These articles have been placed chronologically according to the events in a normal school year.

The **Linking Families to Learning** section gives you tips and forms to engage family and community members as volunteers, strengthen skills at home, and reach out to less-engaged parents.

The **Appendix** contains important material to expand your knowledge of how effective family-community partnerships can get started and flourish in your school, as well as partnership-related web links for teachers.

We hope you turn to this packet for useful, quick information throughout the year, not only in moments when you need something immediately, but also in quieter moments when you have the time and desire to learn more about how teachers and parents can be real partners in helping children learn.

We'd be pleased to hear your ideas about how this packet can be improved. Contact Ruth Anne Landsverk, DPI Families in Education Coordinator, at 608-266-9757 or by e-mail at ruthanne.landsverk@dpi.state.wi.us or Jane Grinde, Bright Beginnings/Family-School-Community Partnerships Director, at 608-266-9356 or via e-mail at jane.grinde@dpi.state.wi.us.

Happy Teaching!

GETTING STARTED

An Overview: Family-School-Community Partnerships Improve Student Learning

What Families Want to Know

Teachers and Families Have Different Perceptions

Family Involvement in Your Classroom: A Teacher Self Assessment Tool

Teacher Tips: Communicating with Families to Help Children Succeed

Techniques for Effective Two-Way Communication Between Home and School

An Overview

Family-School-Community Partnerships Improve Student Learning

Parent involvement? The phrase has caused many a beginning teacher to quake in his or her new school shoes. Lots of teachers, however, have found some great ways to leash that parent power and put it to work helping students learn more and better.

Studies of parent involvement efforts have documented these benefits for students:

- higher grades and test scores,
- better attendance and more homework done,
- fewer placements in special education,
- more positive attitudes and behavior,
- higher graduation rates,
- greater enrollment in post-secondary education (Henderson and Berla, 1994).

Teachers, schools, and communities also profit when schools work well with families. These studies show that schools have:

- improved teacher morale,
- higher ratings of teachers by parents,
- more support from families,
- higher student achievement,
- better reputations in the community (Henderson and Berla,1994).

Epstein found that teacher leadership in parent involvement, especially in guiding parents with learning activities at home, can significantly increase student reading achievement. Her study showed that, when teachers help parents to become involved in student learning, they:

- have improved communication between home and school,
- better understand and support the child's instructional program.

Morever, gains in reading achievement came not only for the parents who made a regular practice of helping their children, but also for children whose parents were simply *encouraged by teachers* to help their children. Teachers also had higher expectations of students whose parents collaborated with them; and higher opinions of those parents, themselves (Dauber and Epstein, 1992).

When schools and families work in partnership, students hear that school is important from their parents and teachers and perceive that caring people in both environments are investing and coordinating time and resources to help them succeed.

Conversely, when parents become involved at school, or with the school, they develop more positive attitudes about school and school personnel, help build support in the community for the program, become more active in community affairs, develop increased self-confidence, and enroll in other educational programs (Becher, 1984).

Challenges

Studies have identified a number of barriers that make it difficult for parents and teachers to work together. Teachers may:

- feel that parents don't have the time or interest to be involved in school or in their child's learning. For example, Davies (1989) found that many teachers believe that parents with low incomes do not value education highly or have little to offer to the education of their children.
- fear that parents will encroach upon their area of responsibility and will not follow instructions and school regulations.
- be very supportive of parent involvement and not understand why parents aren't responding to programs developed by the school.

Parents may:

- distrust schools and be reluctant to get involved because of bad experiences that they had as students. Some view their child's performance as a reflection on themselves and are hesitant to step forward to address problems.
- feel that they lack the skills to be helpful and that if they do step forward school personnel will think that they are interfering.

Perhaps the greatest impediment is that of time. Parents, many who work outside the home, find it difficult to participate in school activities. Teachers, whose days are filled with more and more curricular and non-curricular experiences, more challenging behaviors, and larger class sizes, find the idea of developing parent involvement strategies overwhelming, as do administrators who may spend

most of their time dealing with the immediate crisis of the day.

Teachers want and need training and support to work with parents, especially those whose cultural experience is different from their own. In order to develop effective partnership programs that teachers and parents can use and support, schools should have (Wikeland 1990):

- written school and district policies that establish parent involvement as a legitimate and desirable activity,
- clear and high expectations that parent involvement is a key to improved schools,
- leadership and encouragement,
- sufficient funding,
- time allocated for staff and parents to plan and coordinate family-involvement activities,
- staff and parent training,
- space and equipment,
- food, transportation, and child care as needed for parent meetings.

Planning Your Family-School-Community Partnerships

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction uses a framework for participation, based on Joyce Epstein's work, that includes six types of family-school-community partnerships to create a student-centered learning environment:

- **Parenting**: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.
- **Communicating:** Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.
- **Volunteering**: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.
- **Learning at home:** Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.
- **Decision-making**: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.
- **Collaborating with the community:** Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community. (Also see *A Checklist for Schools: Making Your Family-Community Partnership Work*, in the appendix.)

In addition, be sure to:

- **jointly plan** partnership efforts with parents from the very beginning. The most effective partnership efforts are meaningful to parents because they directly address an expressed need or concern of parents.
- **reach beyond** the parents who "always volunteer." They will be there whether we plan programs or not. Special efforts must be made to welcome all parents and appreciate the contributions each brings to the planning process and beyond.
- **emphasize student learning**. Epstein emphasizes that while not all partnership practices directly impact student learning, partnership activities must also be linked to the school's improvement plan, and parents and community members should participate in the development of the improvement plan.

For example, if the school has a goal for improving reading, then the families and the community should be included in helping to achieve that goal. Partnerships should be an integral part of the school's regular work.

This article is adapted from a 1999 Wisconsin Education Association report by Iris Othrow and Katie Schultz Stout entitled, Involving Families In Order to Improve Student Achievement. Available on-line at www.weac.org.

What Families Want to Know

Approximately 50 family members from several Wisconsin school districts were asked in an informal survey what they would like to say to teachers and what information they would find most beneficial in helping their children learn. Following, is a synopsis of their responses.

Families Want to Belong

- I want to belong.
- Welcome me to the school—don't shut me out.
- Invite me to school—take the initiative.
- Ask for my input, but don't intimidate me.
- Tell me how I can participate in school activities.
- I would like to be a member of an advisory council or family involvement committee.

Families Want Information

- Tell me the philosophy of the school, the channels of authority, and the general goals of each subject studied.
- Tell me the best time to call the teachers, the names of the staff, and their telephone numbers.
- Send me a weekly or monthly newsletter, which lists school events, community resources, and enrichment programs.
- I need to learn strategies I can use with my children when dealing with alcohol and drug prevention, video games, TV programs, peer pressure, and study skills.
- I would appreciate family education workshops or videos to learn about communicating with teens, how to motivate children to study, social pressures, curfews and family rules, college applications, and helping with homework.

Families Want Teacher Contact

- I would like my children's teachers to let me know when and where I can call them.
- Because I work, I need school meetings scheduled during evenings or on weekends.
- Let me know what my children are studying.
- I want to meet the teachers at least once a month.
- Keep communications clear, brief, and simple, not overly technical.

Families Want to Help

- Give me specific ideas about how to complement what my children are learning in school or to strengthen their skills.
- I need ideas for enrichment to supplement my children's classes.
- What can I do to help with homework?
- I need to know what teachers expect at each grade level in emotional, social, and cognitive growth areas.
- If a problem arises with schoolwork, contact me immediately—don't wait for weeks.
- What are your expectations of my children?
- I'd like a family attendance day so I can understand my children's classes better.

Families Want Teachers to Love and Discipline Their Children

- Do something to make my children feel good about themselves.
- Make rules clear and don't put up with inappropriate student behavior.
- Relax when students are acting normally.
- Remind yourselves that you are an important influence in children's lives.
- If I complain about something, don't "take it out" on my children.
- Avoid stereotyping children.
- Praise students for good efforts.
- Contact me about good news, too, not only about problems.
- Care about my children.

Teachers and Families Have Different Perceptions

Most teachers realize how important it is to communicate with families, yet they often feel frustrated in their efforts to communicate. One reason may be the differences in perception that exist between teachers and families. Below is a chart compiled by Mendoza and Cegelka of Project P-Pact, San Diego State University.

Differences in Perception That Can Interfere With Home-School Communication	
The Teacher	**The Family**
Group—must focus on the whole class or group.	**Individual**—is concerned with own child's individual progress, needs.
Established Skills—has knowledge of what child has mastered.	**Emerging Skills**—is concerned with what child is learning.
Present—is concerned with present development of child.	**History**—has the perspective on how far the child has come.
Futuristic—looks to what child will be able to do in the future, career potential.	**Present**—is concerned with here-and-now
Specificity—is concerned with mastering specific skills.	**Diffused**—tends to see whole child's ongoing development.
Cognitive—sees child more abstractly, able to distance self from child.	**Emotional**—has emotional involvement with child.
Achieved/chosen profession—encourages child to make professional career choice.	**Given**—accepts the child as she or he is.
Dominant—has power position, expertise.	**Submissive**—may feel helpless, uneducated.
Universal—looks for one best method, way to work with all children.	**Individualized**—wants to have child approached and taught as an individual.

Compiled by Mendota and Cogelka of Project P-Pact. San Diego State University. Published in Community Education Journal (April 1987). p. 12. Adapted and reprinted with permission.

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Family Involvement in Your Classroom

A Teacher Self Assessment Tool

What's happening? What would you like to be happening? For each statement, circle where you are now, then where you want to be in the future. Remember, you don't have to do it all!

		Never Happens				Often Happens
I am pleased with the turnout I have for parent/teacher conferences.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I regularly schedule parents to help out in my classroom.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I send home student work for parent review and comment.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I ask parents to provide materials, supplies, games for classroom use.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I keep parents well informed about any problems their children are having in my classroom.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I let parents know when their children show improvement or do something well.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I give parents information about how to help their children with homework from my class.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I let parents know how report card grades are earned in my classroom.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I assign homework that requires my students to interact with their parents or other family members.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I make sure parents know what their children are doing in my classroom.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I send a classroom newsletter or bulletin regularly to all parents.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I hold parent meetings/coffees at the school.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I hold parent meetings/coffees in neighborhoods where my students live.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I make home visits.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I share information with parents about parenting, child development.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
Information about my classroom is available on a classroom or school web site.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
Homework assignments from my class(es) are posted on a homework "hotline."	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I invite parents to tell me about their children's strengths, special talents, interests and needs.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5
I attend parent/teacher meetings and other family events at my school.	Now	1	2	3	4	5
	Future	1	2	3	4	5

Developed by The Family Connection of St. Joseph County, Inc. for the Indiana Center for Family, School & Community Partnerships under a grant from the US Dept. of Education.

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Teacher Tips

Communicating with Families to Help Children Succeed

Parents want to hear from teachers about how well children are learning, just as teachers want parents to be aware and supportive of what's going on in school. What's a good way to get the school year off to a positive start and continue to build on that relationship all year? Here are a few ideas.

Be Positive First

- Calling each family early in the school year, especially in the elementary grades, and saying something positive starts your relationship with parents off on the right foot. That initial contact can help you enormously. Parents can give you information about their child that will be helpful in working with the child.
- If you can't call each family, try sending home a flier with your photo, schedule, and a short biography to introduce yourself to parents. Be sure to give telephone numbers and times when you can be reached; consider including your home phone number, if appropriate. A brief summary of what children will learn during the year and your expectations for them will also be appreciated by parents.
- Stress your community ties and share your own experiences as a parent. If you attended the same schools or live in the community, let families know.

Respect Every Family

- Smile and make eye contact when meeting with parents. If you can, sit beside – not across from- the parent. Keep your sense of humor. Laughter can defuse some tense situations.
- Avoid educational jargon. Words like "pro-active" or "needs-based assessments" will only confuse most parents. Using jargon only widens the gap between you and those unfamiliar with it.
- Ask questions about the child's interests and family activities, but respect privacy if you sense resistance.
- Let families know that they are welcome to observe the class frequently, but that teacher and staff conferences require an appointment.

Work Through Problems

- Listen first. Sometimes parents and family members just need to talk through their anger. Try to remember that many parents work long days and worry a lot about their children.
- Acknowledge that being a parent is a difficult job. Try to remember that the child's performance in school is an important part, but only a part, of his or her life.
- If you expect trouble, try a team approach. Include the principal or assistant principal and counselor to help deal with particularly difficult situations and people. Make every effort to avoid putting the parent on the spot. Instead, try to include the parent and student as partners in solving the problem.

Show Parents How the School Works

- One of the best activities during back-to-school night or open house is a brief run-through of an actual school day, including teacher expectations for the year.
- Stress what students are expected to learn, as well as your rules for behavior and grades.
- Offer to explain test results, particularly on state assessments or developmental tests. Many parents are too embarrassed to ask questions, mistakenly assuming that everyone else can interpret the results.
- Spell out the rules clearly early in the school year and stick to them. Parents respect clear and fairly applied rules.

Excerpted from *Helping Students Succeed: What Teachers and PSRPs (Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel) Can Do to Help Families Help Children Succeed*, American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20001-2079; (202) 879-4400.

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Techniques for Effective Two-Way Communication Between Home and School

Families learn about school programs and their children's classroom learning in a variety of ways. Schools with effective two-way communications not only provide several ways to reach families but also have several ways that families are invited to respond back with ideas, questions, and concerns.
Listed below are techniques schools can use to encourage two-way communication. Which techniques does your school use? Circle two techniques you would like to try this year. Add more of your own.

	Elementary	Middle	High School
1. Send letters, notes, post cards, memos, half-and-half letters which ask families to respond (letters may have to be mailed to high school students' families).	❑	❑	❑
2. Send schoolwork home once a week in **a folder** with a place provided for family comments. Require a parent/guardian signature.	❑	❑	❑
3. Develop assignment **calendars** that record students' assignments, and invite families to respond.	❑	❑	❑
4. Send **newsletters** reporting community and school activities. Include a mini-**survey** about discipline, homework, conferences, other related information, and publish the results in the next newsletter. Include recommended movies, books, television specials, and community cultural activities.	❑	❑	❑
5. Ask families to identify two or three concerns before coming to parent-teacher **conferences**. At the conference, listen to families and jointly develop a plan of action.	❑	❑	❑
6. Send small **tape recorders** home to families whose first language is not English or who may not be able to write well in English. The child can explain how to record a message for the teacher and bring the tape recorder back to school.	❑	❑	❑
7. Conduct periodic random **telephone surveys** of families, asking them how well they think the school is communicating and how well their children are learning.	❑	❑	❑
8. Once a month, randomly select a small group of families to **meet informally** with the principal or a teacher. Listen to their views. Discussion can be open-ended or focused on a specific topic.	❑	❑	❑
9. Involve the **PTA/PTO** and school council in data collection. Representatives from these groups can plan activities, find guest speakers, and organize public forums to encourage communication among students, families, teachers, and community members.	❑	❑	❑
10. Organize **classes** for families in which they learn about child development, mental health- issues, study skills, and student motivation. These classes can be provided through cooperation with county extension services, mental health agencies, human service agencies, and schools.	❑	❑	❑

MEETING WITH FAMILIES

Ready, Set, Go! Setting Goals for the School Year With Students and Parents

Ready, Set, Go! Goal Setting Plan by Parent, Teacher, and Student

Welcome to a New School Year

Help Me Know Your Child

How to Have a Great Open House

Ideas for Holding Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences

Getting Ready for Conferences

- Letter to Parents/Guardians
- Teacher's Questions for Parents or Guardians
- Questions for Parents/Guardians to Ask Teachers

Ready, Set, Go!

Setting Goals for the School Year With Students and Parents

More and more school districts are finding that providing teachers, students, and parents with time to meet and get to know one another before or just after school starts is a great way to give learning a jump start. Whether they are called, "Ready, Set, Go!" conferences or "Get to Know You" conferences, teachers and parents report that having a little time to establish positive relationships at the start of the school year goes a long way toward enhancing student learning during the rest of the year.

Many schools schedule a 20- to 30-minute session with each child and at least one parent before school starts or during the first few weeks of the school year. The sessions are child-centered, friendly and relaxed, and the focus is on getting to know each child's strengths, talents, and interests. Often, siblings are invited to come along to play during the meeting, and parents can choose from conferences scheduled during the day or evenings.

Most schools hold such conferences in the classroom, but some teachers visit the homes of families who feel more comfortable in that setting. Although there is no rigid format for these sessions, many teachers encourage the child and parent to respond to questions in a number of areas. The goal is for parent and child to get to know the teacher and establish open, friendly communications for the year.

A Great Way To Start

"It really gets us anchored around the child, how he or she learns best, and what the parent can do at home to support what's happening in the classroom," one fourth-grade teacher in the Verona School District said. "It's the springboard for all other communications during the year and it eases the home-school relationship right away."

The teacher's role to listen, not evaluate, is a role that might take a little getting used to. "I just encourage the child and the parent to talk. I don't fill in the quiet times, but just let conversation happen. You learn a lot about family dynamics and how the child fits in the family."

Here are some ideas for four general areas teachers can discuss with children and parents and take notes on. See the form on page 13.

- **Strengths, talents, and interests.** What is the child good at? What does he or she enjoy doing? Make sure both child and parent have a chance to respond.
- **Friends.** Show the child a class list and ask if he or she has any friends among the names. The information may help when forming cooperative groups. Sometimes, concerns about a child's isolation or aggressive behavior may arise.
- **Concerns.** This is a good time to discuss any problems-academic, social, or behavioral-that the child is experiencing or that occurred during the previous year
- **Goals.** The child and parent together set two or three goals—academic, social, or behavioral—to aim for during the next semester. The goals encourage students to think about areas they would like to improve and the responsibilities they will take to make that happen.

Parents can also be encouraged to discuss specific actions they can take to encourage achieving the goals they set. For instance, a student who wants to improve in spelling may decide that she should study it more frequently and dad may pledge to review spelling words with the child or purchase a dictionary for her use.

For Consideration

- Teachers also may want to ask the child and parent, "What would you like to learn more about this year?"
- Consider having volunteer sign-up sheets available at conferences for volunteer activities parents would like to be involved with: leading a Great Books reading group, assisting in the computer lab or with a drama production, planting a prairie area near the school, and others.
- Write goals into a "Friday Folder" or other folder the student takes home weekly so parents can review the child's learning activities and performance. Encourage parents to write comments or questions in the folder every week and students to evaluate their progress toward meeting their goals by reflecting and writing about their experiences near the end of the grading period.
- Bring the importance of family into the classroom by taking a photograph of the parent and student at the goal-setting session. Display the photos on a "Let's Work Together" bulletin board that stays up all year.
- Scheduling the goal-setting sessions with parents by telephone may be more efficient than through a letter mailed home.

Ready, Set, Go!

Goal Setting Plan by Parent, Teacher, and Student

Goal setting plan for *(Student's Name)*	Date Developed	Date Reviewed

The purpose of goal setting is to assist with communication and planning of the student's learning experiences.

1. Areas of demonstrated strength or ability. Things I am good at in school:

2. Things I am good at outside of school:

3. Things I would like to learn more about:

4. I learn best when:

Goals

Academic

Behavioral *(optional)*

To help me accomplish these goals

I will

My parent(s) will

My teacher(s) will

The following agree by signature to support these goals

Signature of Student	Signature of Parent(s)
➢	➢
Signature of Teacher	Signature of Other School Representative
➢	➢

Contributed by Verona School District

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BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Welcome to a New School Year

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Welcome to a new school year!

We all have a big job ahead of us, but working as partners, we know we'll have a successful school year. We hope to make this school an even better place to learn and grow than it was last year. Our staff has set goals to help every child make the most of each school day.

Soon we will be letting you know about special conferences and events for families and students, but we want you to feel comfortable visiting your school anytime. We look forward to working with you and hope you will find the time to call, visit, volunteer, or share your experiences in our classrooms. Research shows that students are more successful in school when their families help them at home and get involved in school activities.

Please call and visit often!

Principal _____ Telephone _____

Teacher _____ Telephone _____

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Help Me Know Your Child

Date _____

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I invite you to share with me the talents, interests, and habits of your child, so that I may be prepared to teach in the best way possible. Feel free to write on the back of this page or to add additional pages if you need more room to write. Please share any concerns about your child so we can have a cooperative team approach to education. Call and let me know if you would like to visit our classroom or just to talk about your child. The best time to reach me during the day is from _____ a.m./p.m. to _____ a.m./p.m. at _____ (telephone).

1. My child learns best by

2. Some things I do at home to help my child learn are

3. Right now my child's goal/dream is

4. You will know my child is having problems when

5. The thing my child likes best about school is

6. One difficulty my child has at school is

7. When my child is having difficulty learning something, I find it works best to

8. Questions I would like to discuss at a parent-teacher conference include

Please return this form to me by _____.

Teacher _____

How to Have a Great Open House

An open house welcoming families to school early in the school year gives families a chance to meet their children's teachers, to learn about the school's plans and policies, and to hear classroom goals and teacher expectations.

Begin the open house with a general assembly for all families and teachers. As families enter the auditorium or gym, have them fill in name tags and put them on. Encourage teachers and school staff (also wearing name tags) to greet families as they come in.

A suggested format for the open house follows.

- The principal welcomes families and introduces teachers and others, such as school counselor, PTA/PTO president, and secretary.
- If possible, each person introduced should make a few comments (one or two minutes).
- Principal talks about the goals for the year and special events.
- Principal invites families to visit their children's classrooms.
- Classrooms are open for the next 30 to 45 minutes with teachers presiding in the classrooms.
- Refreshments are available either in the classroom, the school family center, or an all-purpose type room.

As appropriate, the principal or teacher should answer general questions.

- What are the school rules regarding visiting, discipline, busing, lunches, homework, cars, and testing procedures?
- When are children taught in groups other than a self-contained classroom?
- How is a child's progress evaluated?
- How much homework is given, and how can families help?
- What level of mathematics will they learn, and how can families help?
- When will children learn computer skills?
- In what school committees or groups are families invited to participate?
- How can parents volunteer in and out of school?
- When is the best time to contact each teacher?
- Are there programs for gifted children and children with learning disabilities?
- What is expected in terms of classroom and school behavior?
- What are the names of principals, counselors, bus supervisor, child-care coordinators, food service managers, and PTA officers?

Even if your district distributed handbooks that answer the above questions, reinforcing what families have read will lead to stronger support from the home. The open house is a get-acquainted session for families and teachers. If teachers have business cards, this is a good time to distribute them. It's also a good time for families to sign up for individual conferences, or enlist as volunteers for a classroom or school activity.

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Ideas for Holding Successful Parent-Teacher Conferences

Teachers need the help of families to do the best possible job of educating children. Parent-teacher conferences offer teachers and parents the chance to consider new ideas and suggestions for helping children learn. Together, they can discuss children's progress, behavior, motivation, and reasons behind successes and failures.

Many schools also encourage parents to bring their child to the conference. Some schools, especially in the upper elementary and middle grades are conducted with the student acting as discussion leader.

Schools and teachers should schedule conferences with the families of individual children early in the term to discuss the progress and potential of the child. Some of the topics that may be discussed are:

- the child's overall ability to do school work.
- the child's progress in all the subject areas.
- samples of the child's work.
- special abilities or interests the child shows.
- books and materials used in the classroom.
- social skills exhibited by the child in and out of the classroom.

Preparing for the Conference

Teachers may contact the family by telephone or letter to arrange a conference. Check with your school principal or other staff members to find out how your school notifies and signs up families for the conferences.

Many schools, for example, send a sign-up sheet home with students so families can choose the three best times for conferences. Confirm in writing the time for the conference. (Following, are samples of a letter and questions for families and teachers that may be duplicated and sent to families before the conference.)

Teachers can improve the family-teacher relationship by encouraging family cooperation, inviting suggestions, welcoming family members' help, recognizing individual and cultural differences, respecting children's feelings, and living up to professional expectations. Teachers must not preach, downgrade family situations, overlook cultural differences in families, or use offensive expressions such as "a broken home."

The parent-teacher conference should be held in a location that allows private, uninterrupted conversation. Families and teachers should be seated on the same level-preferably away from the teacher's desk. Arrange for comfortable seating, with good lighting and ventilation. Organize samples of the children's work and test results so they are easily accessible and will complement the conference plan.

Teachers should write down the topics they plan to discuss with families. Teachers need to know beforehand what they hope to accomplish, communicate, and suggest, and what specific steps can be recommended for families to help improve their children's education. Teachers should discuss children's strong points as well as things that need improving.

During the Conference

Give waiting families folders of their children's work. It makes waiting easier.

Begin the conference with a friendly general remark unrelated to the child. When speaking about the child, start the conference on a positive note, stressing some good points about the student. Emphasize the child's strengths. Use words all family members will understand; do not use technical educational jargon. Do not present a long list of negative concerns to families; work on a few negatives at a time.

Ask families questions to find out about their concerns. Listen carefully so you can separate facts from emotional feelings. Accept comments from families without showing surprise or disapproval.

Give families time to ask questions, to interrupt, and to disagree. Relax and try to gain insight into the families' attitudes toward their children, school, and you. Do not argue with families or impose your opinions on them. If you feel you must change a viewpoint be as diplomatic as possible.

If a child has a problem, ask the family to suggest an approach that could be used at home to help the child. If applicable, suggest alternative approaches for joint consideration. This makes the family a participant in developing plans and may lead to a discussion that will help the family adopt a realistic plan. When working on solutions, try to set up a timetable. Ask for the family's help and help them

accept responsibility for a share in the child's success or failure.

End the conference by summarizing what has been said. Finish with a friendly remark. Thank the family for their concern and time and let them know that you care about and enjoy their child as an individual.

Treat all information as confidential. Document conference notes for future reference. Remember that you represent your school district and that the final goal of parent-teacher conferences is to help children.

Follow-Up

If possible, after the initial family conference, follow up with a phone call or written note. The note might thank the family for attending the conference and ask if the family has begun to follow through with the suggestions made. Encourage the family to discuss the conference with his or her child, if the child was not present, and invite the family to call the teacher or school to check on the child's progress, or simply to keep in touch. Be sure family members know when and where to reach you by phone or e-mail if they have further questions or concerns.

If this follow-up is not possible because large numbers of families were involved, make a special effort to contact those families whom you sensed might have been uneasy or who expressed negative concerns.

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Getting Ready for Conferences

Letter to Parents/Guardians

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian,

The success of your child is important to both of us. We can gain new awareness of your child's particular needs, strengths, and limitations by sharing our observations.

Will you please take the time to meet with me in your child's classroom? I am hoping one of the following dates and times will be convenient for you. Please check the one you prefer and return it to me by _____.

Day: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____ or _____

Day: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____ or _____

I have circled some questions on the attached sheet that I would especially like to discuss with you when we meet. On the same sheet you will find examples of questions families often wish to ask their child's teacher during parent-teacher conferences.

Please feel free to ask me any of those questions when we meet, or anything else about your child's learning. Together, we'll make this a productive year for your child.

Sincerely,

Teacher's Questions for Parents or Guardians

The circled questions are points that I would especially like to discuss with you when we meet. You may wish to bring this sheet along to help focus our discussion at the conference.

1. What does your child like most about school?
2. What would make school more interesting for your child?
3. What activities take up your child's leisure time?
4. What activities do you and your child enjoy doing together?
5. How do you reinforce good behavior at home?
6. Does your child have a quiet place to study at home, and do you monitor study time?
7. What TV programs do you and your child enjoy at home?
8. Does your child get along well with his or her peers?
9. How is your child not meeting your expectations?
10. Are there any attitudes that you hope your child will change?

Questions for Parents/Guardians to Ask Teachers

These sample questions are meant to prompt ideas for things that you may want to talk about with your child's teacher concerning his or her learning. Please feel free to ask about any other concerns you may have, as well.

1. What is my child's class schedule?
2. Is my child working up to his or her ability?
3. Are children grouped for reading and math? What group is my child in, and how are children selected for each group?
4. What are my child's strengths and weaknesses in major subject areas?
5. Does my child need special help in any subject? If so, how can I help my child at home?
6. What will my child be learning this year in reading, math, and science?
7. How much time should be spent on homework, and how can I help with homework?
8. How is my child's work evaluated?
9. What standardized tests will my child take this year, and what will the results be used for?
10. What discipline procedures do you use in the classroom?
11. Does my child get along with other children? With you?
12. Does my child respect the rights and property of others?
13. Does my child show any behavior, such as squinting or irritability, that may be signs of a medical or emotional problem?
14. Can you mention other ways I can help my child reach academic success?
15. What special interest activities are available for my child?

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LINKING FAMILIES TO LEARNING

Teacher Tips: Using and Keeping School Volunteers

Survey of Interest for Volunteers

Letter to Parents: A Note from Your Child's Teacher

Helping Your Child Learn: A Survey for Parents

25 Ideas for Communicating the Curriculum to Families

Teacher Tips: Helping Families Help with Homework

Teacher Tips: Working with Families of Children with Special Needs

Teacher Tips: Involving Less-Engaged Parents

Fifty Ideas to Boost Family-School-Community Partnerships

Teacher Tips

Using and Keeping School Volunteers

The effectiveness of school volunteers depends largely upon the skillful guidance of the classroom teacher. The teacher's attitude toward the volunteer can encourage and inspire, or it can discourage and defeat.

Following, are some frequently-asked questions teachers ask when they consider using volunteers and some general tips to help teachers get volunteer efforts off to a promising start.

What Are School Volunteers?

School volunteers are the parents, students, senior citizens, service organization members, and other community members who care about students and want to help the school district. They perform a variety of tasks, including reading to and with students, sharing hobbies and careers, chaperoning field trips, and assisting with clerical or classroom duties.

How Can School Volunteers Help?

Some of your teaching ideas may require more than two hands to make them succeed. You may need more time to prepare special projects or exhibits, or you may need more time with a student who needs a little extra attention or just someone to talk to.

Can a Volunteer Lighten the Load or Enrich the Curriculum?

Yes! Are there non-teaching jobs which require gathering and organizing material for the classroom or bulletin boards? Maybe you just need an extra set of eyes and ears.

How Do I Get Volunteers to Help?

Check with your school or district to find out if it:

- has a written school board policy that spells out expectations for volunteers,
- recruits, trains, and recognizes volunteers, and
- provides forms and other materials that help teachers obtain and work with the volunteers they need.

Consider recruiting volunteers for your classroom whenever you meet with parents, but especially at the beginning of the school year during back-to-school night, school open house, or other introductory sessions. Have sign-up forms ready for parents to complete and return.

Working Successfully With Volunteers

Get to know the volunteer. Take advantage of his or her special interests, talents, and skills in the activities you plan.

- Assume responsibility for introducing volunteers to the school staff and students with whom they will be working.
- Explain your classroom's rules and basic management procedures.
- Explain the purpose and importance of tasks so the volunteer understands how his or her contributions will help.
- Let the volunteer watch your teaching techniques as you demonstrate activities for students.
- Encourage the volunteer to help plan activities or make suggestions.
- Say "we," not "I," to help the volunteer feel included.
- Plan specific and clearly defined activities for the volunteer.
- As abilities and strengths become apparent, increase the volunteer's responsibilities.
- Provide a regular time each week to plan with the volunteer.
- Make time to ask the volunteer for feedback about his or her progress or to answer any questions.
- Give directions and explanations in nontechnical terms but don't "talk down" to a volunteer.
- Give credit when it is due!
- Recognize the contributions of the volunteer through daily expressions of appreciation and encouragement as well as with certificates of appreciation presented at a school ceremony.
- Remember, there are some responsibilities that should NOT be delegated to a volunteer:
  - — diagnosing
  - — consulting with parents
  - — evaluating on a formal basis
  - — prescribing
  - — providing initial instruction
  - — disciplining students

Contributed by the National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE), Inc., 209 Madison Street, Suite 401, Alexandria, VA 22314 (703) 836-4880. Web site: http://www.napehq.org

For ideas about how schools can establish standards for volunteering, read the PTA handbook on parent involvement standards on the National PTA Web site: http://www.pta.org/programs/invstand.htm.

Survey of Interest for Volunteers

You are invited! As a volunteer, you can help children learn.

Please share your time, skills, or interests with our students. You need not be experienced in teaching, just willing to share. The gift will help our students develop positive attitudes toward learning and motivate them to achieve their potential.

On the form below, please indicate how you are willing to help. We have provided a list to give you some ideas. We welcome your suggestions. This form may be returned in person or by mail to any school office. We will contact you regarding future involvement. Thank you!

Your Name | Telephone Area/No. (Daytime) (Evening)

Address: Street/City/Zip

Names and grades of your children, if any, attending our schools

I am willing to help students by

❑ Coming to School ❑ Working from my Home ❑ No Preference

I Prefer to Work At (Name of School)

I Prefer to Work with the Following Students

❑ Elementary ❑ Middle School ❑ High School ❑ No Preference

I have the following skills to share:

- ❑ Sewing/Needlecraft
- ❑ Working with One Child
- ❑ Typing/Word Processing
- ❑ Working with a Small Group
- ❑ Making Phone Calls
- ❑ Making a Presentation to a Class
- ❑ Cutting Paper Shapes
- ❑ Installing/Designing BulletinBoards
- ❑ Working with Simple Carpentry
- ❑ Shelving/Cataloguing Books
- ❑ Filing
- ❑ Posting Flyers in the Neighborhood
- ❑ Making Posters/Banners
- ❑ Providing Childcare
- ❑ Reading Stories to Children or Listening to Them Read
- ❑ Bookkeeping
- ❑ Keeping Score at Athletic Events
- ❑ Working on Publicity
- ❑ Helping with Math or Science Skills
- ❑ Providing Transportation
- ❑ Organizing School Events or Fund-raisers
- ❑ Chaperoning Field Trips, Bus Trips, or Dances
- ❑ Writing Grants
- ❑ School Decision-Making or Advisory Committees
- ❑ Talking About Career

Other Ways I could Help

My Other Hobbies/Skills (e.g., Camping, Architecture, Swedish Cooking, Local History, Calligraphy, etc.) are

I have Access to a

❑ Computer ❑ Pickup Truck or Van ❑ Sewing Machine ❑ Video Camera

Letter to Parents

Teachers can use the following letter to notify parents that their child is working with a volunteer at school. The letter should be sent home as soon as the child begins working with a volunteer.

A Note from Your Child's Teacher

Date: _____

Hello!

Today your child, _____ , worked with

_____ , a school volunteer.

They worked on these things: _____

_____

_____

_____

Here are some things you could work on at home together to help your child: _____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you!

Helping Your Child Learn

A Survey for Parents

Explaining the Curriculum

Yes	No		
❑	❑	1.	Do you understand what your child is learning and how he or she is being taught?
❑	❑	2.	Has the curriculum been explained adequately to you grade by grade, either by a person or through written materials?
❑	❑	3.	Have you received an orientation or materials explaining educational programs? *(For example: Chapter 1; special, gifted and talented, or bilingual education; AODA; computer lab.)*
❑	❑	4.	Do you have enough ideas and instruction to enhance at home what your child is learning in school?
❑	❑	5.	Do you feel well-informed about important dates, activities, and events?
❑	❑	6.	Do you read the school newsletter?

Student Assessment

Yes	No		
❑	❑	7.	Do you feel informed about the school's goals for student achievement?
❑	❑	8.	Do you feel fully informed about your child's academic performance?
❑	❑	9.	Are report cards and grades explained to you?
❑	❑	10.	Do you have an opportunity to discuss how to improve your child's performance privately with teachers?
❑	❑	11.	Are the results of standardized tests, for your child and the whole class, clearly explained to you?

Parents and Teachers Together

Yes	No		
❑	❑	12.	Do you feel comfortable contacting your child's teachers with questions and concerns?
❑	❑	13.	Do you hear from your child's teachers if your child is doing something well?
❑	❑	14.	Are you notified right away if your child has difficulties at school or falls behind?
❑	❑	15.	Would you attend a school-sponsored social event for parents and teachers to get to know each other?
❑	❑	16.	Would you attend a workshop on how parents and teacher can work together to help your child learn?

School Climate

Yes	No		
❑	❑	17.	Do you feel welcome in your child's school building?
❑	❑	18.	Do you feel welcome to visit or observe your child's classroom?
❑	❑	19.	Have you ever been invited to volunteer in the school or with school activities?

For Working or Single Parents

Yes	No		
❑	❑	20.	Would you like to see more meetings and events held evenings and/or weekends to fit your schedule?
❑	❑	21.	Would you use child care provided during meetings and at other school events?
❑	❑	22.	Are you willing to be reached at work or in the evenings to discuss your child's academic progress?

Helping You More

23. What areas would you like more information or instruction about? *(Check as many as you like.)*

- ❑ the school's educational philosophy
- ❑ parenting education
- ❑ child development
- ❑ helping with homework
- ❑ disciplining my child
- ❑ what my child is learning at school
- ❑ volunteering in my child's school
- ❑ other *(please explain)* _____

_____

24. How do you find out about events happening in yourchild's school? *(Check as many as apply.)*

- ❑ school newsletter
- ❑ local newspaper
- ❑ other parents
- ❑ other *(please describe)*

25. What is the school doing that is most helpful to you as a parent? _____

26. What do you think we could do better to assist you in helping your child learn? _____

_____

Your name is not necessary, but please tell us about yourself *(check all that apply)*

- ❑ Female ❑ Male
- ❑ Parent ❑ Grandparent ❑ Friend
- ❑ I am a single parent
- ❑ There are two adults in our household
- ❑ I work full time
- ❑ I work part time
- ❑ I attend school
- ❑ My spouse or partner works full time
- ❑ My spouse or partner works part time
- ❑ My spouse or partner attends school

I have children in these grades *(circle all that apply)*

Pre-K K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

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25 Ideas for Communicating the Curriculum to Families

Want to keep parents positive and enthusiastic about school? Make sure families are informed in a variety of ways about what their children are learning throughout the school year.

One teacher starts each school day by reminding herself that the bright-eyed children filling her classroom don't come to school each day by themselves. They come with their family members "perched on their shoulders," with the voices, lessons, and hopes of their parents, siblings, grandparents, and other family members resounding in their ears, brains, and hearts.

How many of the following ideas has your school done or even considered doing to ensure that families know and understand what their children are learning and how they can help? Schools with involved families are schools that enjoy more support from families, rank higher on achievement tests, and report content, productive staff members. What have you got to lose?

- Invite new students and their families to a "Get-Acquainted Hour" before school starts or early in the school year.
- Establish and publicize regular visitation days as a way for family members to observe classes and comment on their experiences.
- Schedule school open houses for one grade level at a time. Smaller groups give parents a better chance to get to know staff members and each other.
- Hold a start-of-the-year potluck supper for students and families by grade level or classroom, followed by a short school- or curriculum-related presentation. Food and families bring people together.
- Vary the times for open houses, holding some during the day and some at night, to allow all families to come.
- Organize special outreach efforts for less-engaged families. The personal touch—telephone calls, home visits, and special invitations mailed to families in their own languages—will reap results.
- Work with other teachers to develop grade-level brochures that inform parents what their children will be learning in each subject during the school year, major upcoming school events, and tips for helping with homework. View a template for these brochures at the DPI website: www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfcsp/bbhghlts.html.
- Try a few neighborhood coffees in parents' homes or a local community center. Invite people in a neighborhood area to meet informally with the principal and one or two teachers to chat about the school and education issues.
- Work with other staff members to organize a parent forum informing parents about the Wisconsin Student Assessment System and the State Academic Standards. Provide a time for parents to ask questions and comment. Also provide them with copies of the DPI brochure, *A Parent's Guide to Standards and Assessment*, available on-line at www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfcsp/bbhghlts.html.
- Advertise the telephone number(s) and times when parents can call teachers during the day to ask questions or discuss their children's progress.
- Devote time at staff workshops to discussing skills for communicating with parents and ways to get feedback from them.
- Set up a "family shelf" in classrooms or in the school library with materials parents can check out on child development, discipline, homework techniques, and learning styles. Place copies of school textbooks in school and public libraries for parents to check out.
- Is there a place for visiting parents and family members to hang their hats while visiting your school? Designate space for a school family center in the school building where parents can talk with teachers, community groups can meet, and the lights and coffee machine are on!
- Suggest that parents shadow their children for a day to experience a typical school day.
- Organize a parent-and-student field trip so they can learn together.
- Develop a "How Parents Can Help" handbook which offers practical suggestions for doing learning activities in the home and in the community, creat-

ing a learning-friendly home environment, and establishing good homework guidelines.

- Start a "Family Corner" in your school district newsletter that invites the PTA, PTO, or individual parents to talk about opportunities for families to become involved.
- Offer computer and family math night programs for parents and students to learn together.
- Videotape or publish short summaries of programs or presentations offered by your school for families so those unable to attend will still be able to learn from them.
- Offer learning-together opportunities that especially appeal to fathers, such as programs on the father-child relationship; making kitchen, science, music, or art projects; and gym or athletic activities.
- Involve parents in creating your own parent-teacher-student learning compact or agreement.
- Enclose a two-minute survey in report cards asking parents how well they think your school is helping children learn. Publish the results promptly.
- Keep weekly school newsletters to one or two sides of a page on brightly-colored paper so it can be read easily and quickly. Publish your school's goals for the year and leave a "clip'n comment corner" for parents to jot down a thought or two about a featured school issue.
- Create opportunities for families to volunteer together in a youth service-learning project—in a community drive for the local food pantry, cleaning up a park, or visiting those in need.
- Establish a "Families and Friends Program," bringing families from different neighborhoods or cultural backgrounds together at a school picnic and another time during the year to share food, conversation about the curriculum, and the joys of parenting.

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Teacher Tips

Helping Families Help with Homework

Teachers can encourage families to monitor and talk about school assignments with their children. Families who are aware of their children's school program are able to give more support to their children's efforts in school and reinforce the teacher's goals. Students who know their families communicate with their teachers and support learning goals talk more about schoolwork and school decisions at home.

In fact, the *1998 Reading Report Card for the Nation and States* concluded that students in Grades 4, 8, and 12 who had at least weekly home discussions about their studies averaged higher reading scores than students who reported discussing their studies less frequently. Students who had such discussions almost every day were associated with the highest average score, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported.

The research also shows that teacher leadership in involving parents with learning activities at home significantly improves student achievement. In a study (Epstein 1991) of student achievement in 14 elementary classrooms, reading test scores of students improved from the fall to the spring after teachers used various techniques to involve parents in reading activities with their children at home. The study also found that reading gains came not only for children whose parents made a regular practice of helping them, but also for children whose parents were *encouraged by teachers* to help them.

"Parents are one available but untapped and undirected resource that teachers can mobilize to help more children master and maintain needed skills for schools...this requires teachers' leadership in organizing, evaluating, and continually building their parent involvement practices," the study concluded.

Here are some tips for getting families on board with homework expectations:

- At the beginning of the school year or semester, give parents a "homework calendar," listing all major assignments (books to read, papers to write, special projects to complete) and the due dates. Suggest that students write the due dates on the calendar and that adults periodically check progress. This is one way adults can help children avoid last-minute panic in completing assignments.
- At the beginning of the year or semester, inform families about your homework expectations. In either a start-of-the-year parent-teacher meeting or in a note to families, briefly explain your philosophy of homework and generally what kinds of assignments will be made. How do homework assignments fit in with curriculum and school goals? What weight will homework assignments have on grades? How much time per night or week can students be expected to spend on homework?
- Offer families some basic guidelines on how to encourage their children to complete homework on time, tips for setting up an appropriate time and place to study at home, and what to do if their child finds it difficult to understand or complete homework assignments. Visit the U.S. Department of Education website at www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Homework for parent-friendly, reproducible materials.
- Help students develop assignment notebooks with space for the assignment, due date, teacher comments, and family comments. Send home a note about these notebooks and seek cooperation from home in using them. This can be an effective way to communicate daily or weekly with home.
- Be sure students understand the assignments before they leave class.
- Make homework assignments meaningful and give students feedback on the assignments. Students will soon lose interest in doing assignments that are simply busy work or that are never checked. If assignments are worth doing, they are worth feedback.
- Homework assignments should be based on materials that are readily available to students. Offer ideas for further resources at the school or public library and on the Internet.
- Assignments should not require teaching by the adult at home.
- If homework assignments are not being completed, call the child's home. If a phone call does not solve the problem, arrange a meeting with the student and family.

Teacher Tips

Working with Families of Children with Special Needs

How can teachers of special education students work more effectively with students' families? Researchers in 1998 interviewed 80 parents of children or young adults who received special education services in public schools and found that responses could be organized into six common themes:

1. **"Listen to us!"** Nearly 30 percent of parents in the study said they wanted educators to listen, both to their input and to their problems. Two-thirds of parents responding in this category said educators should realize that parents know and understand their children; their contributions and suggestions are valuable and should be heard and respected. The remaining third of parent respondents wanted teachers to listen to their personal issues and be responsive to their feelings.
2. **Strengthen communication between parents and professionals.** Nearly 25 percent of parents responded that the quality and quantity of communication between parents and professionals should be improved. Several parents urged educators to be more humane when discussing their children, treating them in a more honest manner and with dignity and respect. Other parents wanted more frequent and consistent communication with professionals.
3. **Be aware of families' needs and differences.** About 18 percent of parents suggested that educators be more sensitive to the needs of their family, including constraints of time and expertise, as well as to the differences among families. Most responses in this category indicated that educators should realize every family is different, should try to get to know more families in depth, and should see the family's point of view.
4. **Be knowledgeable about my child's disability.** (15% of respondents)
5. **Respect my child and try to meet his or her needs.** (12%)
6. **Improve the Individualized Education Plan process.** (4%)

Steps for Teachers to Take

Here are some specific steps educators of special needs students can take to promote more sensitive, effective communications and decision-making partnerships with families:

- Value parents' contributions. As the one constant in their children's lives, parents have valuable information and observations to offer educators about their child's learning. Families want teachers to be supportive and nonjudgmental as they strive to deal with the day-to-day parenting of their children with special needs.
- Communicate respectfully with parents. Just as educators need to listen carefully, they also need to monitor their verbal and written communications with families to ensure they are done with mutual respect. Parents request that teachers speak to them as they would speak to a friend or equal, without dominance or the implication of intolerance. Establish regular notes, phone calls, or meetings to detail successes, as well as concerns. Teachers must help families feel comfortable contacting school with information about home or related services that affects student performance.
- Be sensitive to the needs of the student as one member of a family. Parents encourage teachers to "walk a mile in their shoes" and imagine how they might feel if they were parenting a child with special needs. Being aware of family issues also means that educators must monitor their advice to fit individual families while building their own knowledge of available family supports.
- Increase your knowledge about disabilities. Strive to be a lifelong learner in your field with the goal of becoming even more prepared to address the complexities of your students' needs.
- Accommodate the individual needs of students. Parents request that educators provide a supportive and nurturing environment that fosters student self-awareness and self-esteem. Educators who help students understand their strengths and needs allow students to be risk-takers and partners.
- Improve the IEP process to be more receptive to family issues. Because the IEP is the one mandated interaction between school and family, it must reflect to the fullest degree the potential for strong collaborative relationships. Parents want to feel that they are equal partners in a team striving for the same goals. Develop instructional goals collaboratively with families.

Parents know their children better than anyone else. They can represent them in a way no one else can, advocating for what they feel and know is best. Unless their message is recognized and acted upon, true collaboration that results in meeting the child's best interests cannot be realized.

Adapted from an article by Pamela Pruitt, Donna Wandry, and Diane Hollums. *Listen to us! Parents speak out about their interactions with special educators*, Preventing School Failure, Summer 98, Vol. 42, Issue 4, p. 161, Item Number: 1029951. Reprinted with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Published by Heldref Publications, 1319 18th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802.

Teacher Tips

Involving Less-Engaged Parents

Schools reporting success in reaching less-engaged parents (those who do not attend school events regardless of efforts or invitations) are succeeding by "taking the schools to the community." Less-engaged parents can be from any geographic setting, ethnic group, or income level.

Ideas for Outreach Activities

Hold coffee-and-doughnut discussions with groups of parents in their homes or at a community center. Communication can take place in a non-threatening setting. Start with the positive aspects of the school and be honest in responding to questions and challenges.

Be available to parents at local sites. In one district, principals, the superintendent, and board members each take two hours on one Saturday each month, on a rotating basis, to make themselves available to parents at local sites—church, supermarket, library, or community center—wherever parents gather. Let parents know you will be there and want to meet them and answer their questions.

Offer transportation to school activities you would like parents to attend and provide child care facilities. Ask local service clubs to volunteer use of their vans or other vehicles for a special event.

Go to the churches, synagogues, or other places of worship. Work with the clergy in setting up opportunities for parents and community residents to talk about the schools and ways to help students. Ask the clergy for support and suggestions. (Send copies of your district and/or school building newsletter for distribution at places of worship.)

Locate community leaders and invite them to help you communicate with less-engaged parents. Develop a special neighborhood network by inviting these leaders to be your "key communicators" and share with you the concerns of parents. Ask these leaders to help you survey the parents to determine their needs.

Offer programs to meet parents' needs and those of other members of their neighborhood or community. These may not always be school-oriented. Working to improve housing, providing day-care facilities, or offering recreation or after-school activities in community centers may be the first step in reaching less-engaged parents and letting them know you care.

Provide school representatives, or recruit community volunteers who are fluent in the language of ethnic groups. Offer English classes, as well as parenting classes, to help these parents help their children. Hold them in locations and at times convenient for them.

Offer to hold parent-teacher conferences in the neighborhoods—churches, youth centers, and so forth.

Make sure your school projects warmth and concern for parents and students. Customs and expectations differ. It is the school leaders' challenge to find the proper vehicles and approaches for communicating with and involving hard-to-reach parents to help them help their children.

Ask parents the best ways to reach them. Any time you have a group of hard-to-reach parents together, ask them what are the best ways to communicate with them. What are the best locations and times for them to meet? What kind of information do they want? How do they want to receive information about their child and the school?

Source. Dr Santee Ruffin in *Helping Parents Help Their Kids*, from the National School Public Relations Association This article was originally printed in *It Starts on the Frontline* (Feb.1996) The National School Public Relations Association, 1501 Lee Hwy. Ste 201. Arlington, VA 22209, (703) 528-5840.

Fifty Ideas to Boost Family-School-Community Partnerships

How many of these ideas have been tried by the staff at your school? Which ones could you start or, if underway, could you reach more families with by doing differently? These ideas would also be good discussion starters for a staff inservice or a workshop on improving teacher-family communication.

Effective family-school-community partnerships take planning by an action team composed of teachers and parents in roughly equal numbers, a school administrator, and community members. A good program may take three to five years to establish, so keep moving ahead!

Partnership efforts are most likely to be effective if they are:

- meaningful to and needed by families.
- convenient for families.
- administered in a supportive climate.
- communicated to families several times in a variety of ways.

Listed below are 50 ideas for family involvement. Mark those that you ...

✓ = Tried with success within the last three years.

✗ = Tried, but with limited success.

→ = Plan to do this year.

< = Think will not work in your school.

O = Have never tried.

Teachers can implement some of these ideas; others need an administrator's initiative. In small groups, teachers can share their successes and offer practical suggestions to improve practices that have met with limited success. Encourage teachers to review these 50 ideas and to suggest ways to make ideas work, or to offer alternatives.

_____ 1. Schedule parent-teacher conferences at the convenience of both parties, either after school or in the evening. Offer families a choice of times and provide childcare for any family requesting it. Consider home visits to families not able to come to school.

_____ 2. Ask parents to evaluate parent-teacher conferences. Ask parents how effective the conference was and what additional kinds of information they want about classroom activities, communication, or other concerns.

_____ 3. Kick-off the school year or banish the winter blahs with a family-staff picnic or a family-faculty athletic event, such as a one-mile race, basketball game, or tennis tournament.

_____ 4. Invite families to play together in the school gym at a weekly Family Recreation Night.

_____ 5. Send home unit goals so families can help children reach the goals set by the teacher.

_____ 6. Let younger children take envelopes or folders home on Friday to their families with the week's work enclosed. Invite parental feedback either on the envelope or on a preprinted postcard.

_____ 7. Invite parents to be members of all school committees. Aim for equal parent and staff representation on committees, especially those dealing with family-school-community partnership issues. Make sure parents represent all students in your school.

_____ 8. Offer computer and family math programs during which families and students can learn together.

_____ 9. Invite families to select a book or chapter or poem to read to their children's class, reinforcing a lifelong commitment to reading.

_____ 10. Encourage students to adopt pen pals who are senior citizens or businesspeople. The letters often provide the impetus for getting community members involved in school.

_____ 11. Invite families to volunteer to help with after-school activities in which their children show an interest (drama club, music, Girl/Boy Scouts, other).

_____ 12. Establish a homework hotline. This could be a tape-recorded message to call, a computer modem hookup, or a family network.

_____ 13. Have a monthly birthday calendar for students and staff posted in the hallway. Have the school food staff make cupcakes or a birthday cake for celebrants. Add new students when they arrive. The calendar could also be distributed in homes or sold as a moneymaker.

_____ 14. Make a bulletin board available in the school lobby for families to share photos and other memorabilia.

_____ 15. Invite children new to the district or school and their families to a Get-to-Know-You Hour the week before school starts.

_____ 16. Invite new teachers and new families on a tour of the district. Point out facilities available in the area, places that could be used for field trips, boundaries of attendance area, youth center, and other community sites which may interest families.

_____ 17. Develop a slide presentation or a video orienting families and students to the school. Involve high school students or volunteers in producing the presentation.

_____ 18. Announce a Family Visitation Day that includes time for families to offer suggestions, ask questions, and observe children in class.

_____ 19. Place a "Welcome to Our School" sign and a map at school entrances.

_____ 20. Organize a partner system for new students. Students who will make newcomers feel comfortable are good ambassadors; they also build self-esteem as they participate. Call the family and describe your effort to make the new student feel welcome. Plan activities and follow through to cover at least two weeks. New families also could be assigned a partner family. Welcome them with packets of information on the school and community.

_____ 21. Sponsor a talent show that involves students, families, faculty, and administrators.

_____ 22. Develop a well-organized volunteer program. Let parents, guardians, grandparents, community members, and business people know they are needed.

_____ 23. Invite families to help with instructional activities for students, such as bike rodeos, book and video swaps, theater workshops, or art shows.

_____ 24. Encourage a families' group to sponsor a health fair at school in which various community agencies bring exhibits and displays.

_____ 25. Work with the Chamber of Commerce, realtors, or other groups to send a packet of information about the school to new residents in the community and invite them to visit. Include such information on your school website.

_____ 26. Hold a School-Community Awards Day. Let students, staff, and volunteers nominate recipients from the school and community to be recognized for their service and excellence. Certificates of appreciation can be given to the nominees. Invite the press.

_____ 27. Include a survey in welcome materials to new families asking about their interests, needs, and concerns.

_____ 28. Develop family surveys on key issues, school policies, home-school communication, community needs, and interests. Ask a local club to mail the survey and count survey answers.

_____ 29. Ask students, perhaps as a classroom project, to conduct a survey of families to evaluate the school and collect ideas for improvement. Promptly announce survey results to all families in the school newsletter. Hold a family forum as a follow-up.

_____ 30. Improve the quality and frequency of the school newsletter. Set up an idea exchange by asking families to send in ideas. Publish the ideas in future issues. You can also check with the Wisconsin School Public Relations Association (WSPRA) for help.

_____ 31. Publish a curriculum calendar or syllabus in your school newsletter or in your local newspaper.

_____ 32. Ask other local organizations to print family involvement tips and information about school programs in their publications.

_____ 33. Ask the local media to cover school board meetings if this is not standard procedure.

_____ 34. Design an up-to-date logo, perhaps with the help of an art student, so people will immediately recognize letters or notices from your school.

_____ 35. Set up a speaker's bureau. Include students, families, community leaders, and school staff willing to talk about school programs to interested individuals, groups, and businesses. Or, include those who are willing to share their interests and talents with students.

_____ 36. Encourage school and community summer activities workshops and enrichment programs.

_____ 37. Have an evening or Saturday morning workshop for single parents and for fathers. Offer activities and ideas that take advantage of their unique strengths and that inform them about how and what their children are learning. Invite them to talk about their challenges and concerns as parents of school-aged children. Be prepared to act upon their ideas and to address their concerns. Hold seminars for two-career families and families of ESL students, too.

_____ 38. Invite families to breakfast or school lunch with the principal or superintendent. Listen to their concerns and ideas.

_____ 39. Conduct a class for families on health and nutrition taught by the school nurse, a registered dietitian, or a human service agent.

_____ 40. Make sure families are aware of resources, tutors, or support services to help address school-related issues, as well as child development issues.

_____ 41. Provide parents with summaries of recent research findings on topics such as the average hours of sleep children need per night by age, the average number of hours students at each grade devote to homework, television viewing habits, and other topics.

_____ 42. Ask your community agencies to lend their vans or buses to transport families and senior citizens to school functions.

_____ 43. Try to get media coverage of special school events.

_____ 44. Place suggestion boxes in key locations in the school and community. "I Have An Idea" cards near the boxes encourage positive contributions. For this to be effective, someone needs to respond to each suggestion.

_____ 45. Attract families to school events by putting their children on the program. Children can introduce speakers, perform, serve as ushers, be greeters, or have many other duties.

_____ 46. Plan an evening movie (film or video) night for teenage students, families, and teachers. Hold a discussion of the movie afterwards.

_____ 47. Initiate enrichment courses or evening talks on communication, discipline, peer pressure, study habits, careers, or drug and alcohol abuse for middle and high school students and their families. Invite a panel of students to talk about the issues they deal with.

_____ 48. Assign a time every week for families with pre-school children to play in the school gym during the day when it is not being used. Allow parents to network and become familiar with the school.

_____ 49. Hold a Family and Community Town Supper that allows families and community members to discuss a timely issue, listen to a panel presenting both sides of the issue, discuss it over an informal meal, and vote on it as they get dessert. Announce the results of the vote and what steps the school will take next.

_____ 50. Offer senior citizens and school volunteers reduced ticket prices to school-sponsored athletic and arts events. Create special buttons they can wear to the events in recognition of their support.

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APPENDIX

The Six Types of Family-School-Community Partnerships

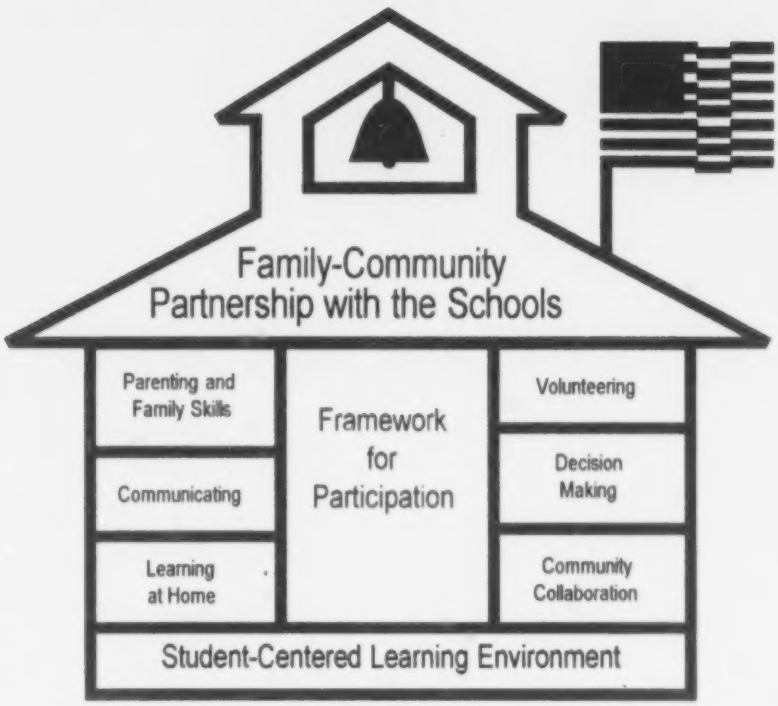
A Checklist for Schools: Making Your Family-Community Partnership Work

How Far Has Our School Moved Toward Partnership with Families?

Web Resources for Teachers on Family-School-Community Partnerships

Appendix

The Six Types
of Family-School-Community Partnerships



The Six Types

Parenting—Build on parenting strengths and help families improve parenting skills. Facilitate support systems and networks to enable families to effectively nurture their children.

Communicating—Design and implement effective two-way communication practices to reach families, both individually and collectively. These practices should ensure that families and school staff communicate back and forth about their children.

Learning at Home—Provide for families and school staff to work together in developing learning goals and offering opportunities for learning activities at home and in the community to meet the goals.

Volunteering—Recruit and organize volunteer participation from families and the community at-large.

Decision Making—Design governance structure through which parents are partners in policy decisions so that families have opportunities to give their opinions and to participate in decision making about school programs. Recruit families to act as advocates and decision makers and represent other parents and families.

Community Collaboration—Establish partnerships with individuals and organizations in the community.

**Based on the research of Joyce Epstein, co-director, Center on Families, Communities, Schools & Children's Learning, John Hopkins University. Implementation through the League of Schools Reaching Out, Institute for Responsive Education, Boston.*

Getting it Done

Leadership—Who is in charge and has the authority to organize and assign tasks? One person should be accountable for the results.

Analysis—What are the needs and challenges? What results do you want? Develop a basis for your efforts.

Planning and Policy Development—What must be done? How? Who will do it? What is the time line? School board policy and district and school procedures may need to be developed.

Action/Implementation—With the groundwork laid, how much of the plan can you put in place? While the six types of family-community participation for schools are interrelated and important for a comprehensive approach, determine what is possible and practical at any given time. Don't delay doing something because the whole plan is not in place.

Evaluation—What worked? What didn't? What needs changing or fine tuning? Listen and learn from experiences.

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A Checklist for Schools

Making Your Family-Community Partnership Work

Following are examples of practices and programs that schools and districts can use to encourage family and community support of children's learning. They are meant to be advisory and should be adapted to each school's or district's needs.

Parenting and Family Skills

- ❑ 1. We sponsor family learning workshops on topics suggested by parents, and held at times and places easily accessible to all parents.
- ❑ 2. We ask families what types of workshops or informational events they would be interested in attending and what session times are most convenient for them.
- ❑ 3. We provide families with information on child development.
- ❑ 4. We lend families books and tapes on parenting and parent workshops.
- ❑ 5. We provide families with information about developing home conditions that support school learning.
- ❑ 6. We survey parents to determine their needs, assign staff members to help address those needs, and work to link parents with community resources.
- ❑ 7. We have a family center or help parents access other resource centers in the community.
- ❑ 8. We have support groups for families with special interests and needs.
- ❑ 9. We train staff members and support them in reaching out to all families.
- ❑ 10. Other: _____

Communicating

- ❑ 1. We schedule parent-teacher-student conferences to establish student learning goals for the year.
- ❑ 2. We listen to parents tell us about their children's strengths and how they learn.
- ❑ 3. We follow the "Rule of Seven:" offering at least seven different ways that parents and community members can learn about what is happening in the school and comment on it.
- ❑ 4. Teachers have ready access to telephones to communicate with parents during or after the school day.
- ❑ 5. Staff members send home positive messages about students.
- ❑ 6. We make efforts to communicate with fathers.
- ❑ 7. Staff members make home visits.
- ❑ 8. Parents know the telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of school staff members and the times teachers are available to take phone calls from parents.
- ❑ 9. We involve families in student award and recognition events.
- ❑ 10. We encourage and make provisions for staff members to communicate with parents about the child's progress several times each semester.
- ❑ 11. We communicate the school's mission and expectations for students to parents.
- ❑ 12. The school has a homework hotline or other kind of telephone system.
- ❑ 13. We provide parents with structured ways to comment on the school's communications, for example, with mailed, phone, or take-home surveys.
- ❑ 14. We have staff members available to assist and support parents in their interactions with the school (i.e. home-school liaisons).
- 15. We send home communications about
  - ❑ student academic progress
  - ❑ meetings at school
  - ❑ how parents can be involved in student activities
  - ❑ Parent Association
  - ❑ student discipline
  - ❑ child development
  - ❑ the curriculum
  - ❑ how parents can be involved as volunteers
  - ❑ how parents can be involved in school governance
  - ❑ how parents can help with homework and encourage learning at home
  - ❑ community resources available to families
  - ❑ how parents can communicate with school staff
  - ❑ the school's philosophy of learning.
- ❑ 16. We directly speak to parents (does not include leaving messages on answering machines) if students are having academic difficulty or causing classroom disruptions **before** a crisis occurs.
- ❑ 17. We provide copies of school textbooks and publications about the school to the public library.
- ❑ 18. Other: _____

Learning at Home

- ❑ 1. We have specific goals and activities that keep parents informed about and supportive of their children's homework.
- ❑ 2. We offer learning activities and events for the whole family.
- ❑ 3. We invite parents to borrow resources from school libraries for themselves and their families.
- ❑ 4. We link parents with resources and activities in the community that promote learning.
- ❑ 5. We give parents materials they can use to evaluate their child's progress and provide feedback to teachers.

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- ❑ 6. We help parents understand student assessments, including report cards and testing, and how to help students improve.
- ❑ 7. School staff and school communications help parents link home learning activities to learning in the classroom.
- ❑ 8. We include parents and other community members in developing children's learning outside of school activities.
- ❑ 9. Other: _____

_____

Volunteering

- ❑ 1. We encourage families and other community members to volunteer their support by attending school events.
- ❑ 2. We offer youth service learning opportunities for students who want to volunteer in the community.
- ❑ 3. We help school staff learn how to work with parent and community volunteers.
- ❑ 4. We ask family members how they would like to participate as volunteers at their child's school or in the community, and we respond in a timely manner to their offers of assistance.
- 5. We encourage family and community members to become involved as
  - ❑ participants in site-based management councils
  - ❑ presenters to students on careers and other topics
  - ❑ assistants with art shows, read-aloud events, theater workshops, book swaps, and other activities
  - ❑ tutors/mentors
  - ❑ chaperones on field trips and other class outings
  - ❑ instructional assistants in classrooms, libraries, and computer labs
  - ❑ non-instructional assistants
  - ❑ from-the-home contributors of baked goods, assembling materials, typing, etc.
- ❑ 6. We offer volunteer opportunities for working and single parents.
- ❑ 7. We have a program to recognize school volunteers.
- ❑ 8. We gather information about the level and frequency of family and community participation in school programs.
- ❑ 9. Other: _____

_____

Governance and Advocacy

- ❑ 1. We encourage parents to attend school board and site council meetings.
- ❑ 2. We assign staff members to help parents address concerns or complaints.
- ❑ 3. We invite staff and parent groups to meet collaboratively, providing space and time to do so.
- ❑ 4. We help families advocate for each other.
- 5. We involve parents in
  - ❑ revising school and district curricula
  - ❑ planning orientation programs for new families
  - ❑ developing parenting skills programs
  - ❑ establishing membership for site-based councils
  - ❑ hiring staff members.
- ❑ 6. Other: _____

_____

Community Collaboration

- ❑ 1. We act as a source of information and referral about services available in the community for families.
- ❑ 2. We use a variety of strategies to reach out to adults, families, and children of all ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds in the community.
- ❑ 3. We encourage local civic and service groups to become involved in schools in a variety of ways such as mentoring students, volunteering, speaking to classes, and helping with fund-raising events.
- ❑ 4. We encourage staff and students to participate in youth service-learning opportunities.
- ❑ 5. We open our school buildings for use by the community beyond regular school hours.
- ❑ 6. We work with the local chamber of commerce or business partnership council and public library to promote adult literacy.
- ❑ 7. We have a program with local businesses that enhances student work skills.
- ❑ 8. We widely publish and disseminate school board meeting notices, summaries, and board policies and agendas, and encourage the feedback and participation of community members.
- ❑ 9. Other: _____

_____

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Families in Education Program

How Far Has Our School Moved Toward Partnership with Families?

When schools involve families, children do better in school. The schools get better, too. This section is a scoring guide that sets a high standard of partnership. You can rate your school on that standard. Is your school more like a Partnership School or a Fortress School? Is it like an Open Door School or a Come-If-We-Call School?

First, read more about these schools. Then, check the boxes that fit your school. Where are your checks? If most are under Partnership and Open Door, your school meets a high standard. If most are under Fortress and Come-if-We-Call, your school needs help. Bring parents, administrators and teachers together. Show them this guide. Talk about how you can move toward Partnership.

Is Your School a FORTRESS SCHOOL?

Fortress Schools keep parents outside. When students don't do well, the school often blames: them—and their families. It seems as if the school thinks, "We'd be a good school if we had better students and families."

Check the boxes that sound like your school:

- ❑ The school does not give parents information about learning standards.
- ❑ It's not easy for parents to talk to school staff.
- ❑ If there is a parent group, it's handpicked by school staff.
- ❑ Few parents or community people visit the school. The front office is not friendly.
- ❑ Parents are afraid to complain or ask questions. "They may take it out on my child."
- ❑ The school doesn't share student test scores with parents.
- ❑ Families feel like outsiders.

Is Your School a "COME-IF-WE-CALL" SCHOOL?

Come-If-We-Call Schools don't expect a lot of students or families. Families are welcome, but only when asked.

Check the boxes that describe your school:

- ❑ The standards for learning are not clear.
- ❑ The school calls families only when a child has done something wrong.
- ❑ Teachers see parents only at conference time and at special events.
- ❑ An "in-crowd" of parents does all the work. Other parents feel they don't belong.
- ❑ If there is a school handbook, it's all about rules and discipline.
- ❑ Volunteers have to fill out long forms.
- ❑ Families have no say in school decisions.

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Is Your School an OPEN DOOR SCHOOL?

Open Door Schools try to help all students. Nearly all families come to the school at least once or twice a year. But teachers and the principal decide how parents will be involved.

Check the boxes that describe your school:

- ❑ Families get information about what students are learning. Teachers send home folders of student work.
- ❑ The school has a family center.
- ❑ The parent group sets its own agenda.
- ❑ Parents helped write the school handbook.
- ❑ The school feels families have much to offer, but they are not experts in education.
- ❑ Families talk to classes about their jobs and help out as tutors.
- ❑ Most teachers or advisors try to contact their students' families once a month.
- ❑ The school shares its test scores with families, but it's hard to understand.

Is your School a PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL?

Partnership Schools have high standards for all students, in all classrooms. This school does whatever it takes to make sure that every student succeeds.

Check the boxes that sound like your school:

- ❑ Families and school staff set the school vision together.
- ❑ Families and staff talk all the time about how students are doing.
- ❑ All students get extra help if they need it.
- ❑ The school shares power with families. Families are part of all big decisions, such as hiring the principal.
- ❑ Parents are on standards committees and know how to look at student work.
- ❑ Training for staff is open to families. Families learn how the system works.
- ❑ Data on student progress is shared in ways that parents can understand.
- ❑ Parents and teachers talk openly about tough issues like racism and tracking.
- ❑ The family center offers education, job training, and advocacy skills.
- ❑ The school budget supports partnership. It pays for childcare and transportation.
- ❑ Parents can use the telephone, copier, fax, and computers.

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Web Resources for Teachers on Family-School-Community Partnerships

The following list of Internet sites offers teachers further information, guidance, and ideas about how schools and families can work together effectively to promote children's learning. Most sites also feature links to other useful sites and resources.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, **www.dpi.state.wi.us**, offers information on state education programs and initiatives, including the Wisconsin/National Network of Partnership Schools, the State Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council, and reproducible materials. Two brochures of particular interest to parents are downloadable:

- A Parent's Guide to Standards and Assessment, and
- A template for Grade-Level Brochures for Parents.

The U.S. Department of Education website, **www.ed.gov**, features the Partnership for Family Involvement on its homepage. Available under Publications and Products, are a *Survival Guide for New Teachers* and many downloadable publications for parents.

The National Network of Partnership Schools, **www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000** is based at Johns Hopkins University and offers excellent tools and strategies for implementing family-school-community partnerships in schools and classrooms. Wisconsin is a state member of the Network along with about 65 Wisconsin school and district members.

The National Parent Information Network, **http://npin.org,** co-sponsored by the ERIC Clearinghouses on Elementary and Early Childhood Education and Urban Education, includes extensive articles on parenting, listservs, and links to more than 100 sites on education, health and safety, family issues, child development, and parenting.

The Family Education Network, **www.familyeducation.com**, offers hundreds of brief articles on parenting, links to local sites, and discussion boards that connect parents with on-line experts.

The National Coalition for Parental Involvement in Education, **www.ncpie.org**, provides a catalog of resources available from all its member organizations.

The National Association of Partners in Education, **www.napehq.org**, is a grassroots membership organization dedicated to providing leadership in forming and growing partnerships to ensure the learning success of all children. Its website offers publications, links, and newsletter articles highlighting successful partnership practices.

The National Education Association's site, **www.nea.org**, with links to the Wisconsin Education Association, **www.weac.org**, offers a useful Parents section with many tips for teachers, articles on current practices and research, and learning at home strategies.

The Harvard Family Research Project, **http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp**, publishes research findings and provides technical assistance to a nationwide network of practitioners, policymakers, and educators. The site offers a useful Family-School-Community Partnerships section with models, solutions for sustaining partnerships, and web connections.

Pathways to Social Improvement, **www.ncrel.org/sdrs/**, is found on the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) website. It offers an extensive and in-depth section on Parent and Family Involvement. The two "Critical Issues" highlighted at this site offer respected reviews of the issues and hyperlinks well worth exploring.

Hand in Hand: Parents Schools Communities United for Kids, **www.handinhand.org**, was developed as a response to Goal 8, the Parental Involvement Goal of the National Education Goals 2000. It was established to share information about programs that value and nurture the family and community role in children's learning. The site is coordinated by the Institute for Educational Leadership and funded by the Mattel Foundation.

At the National PTA site, **www.pta.org**, learn about PTA education groups, and participate in a discussion group, chat room, or bulletin board. The site also offers many links to sites of other organizations concerned about children.

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